Called to the Joy of Love:

National Pastoral Framework for Marriage and Family Life Ministry

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Washington, DC

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Introduction

The Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed.[1]

God's plan for marriage and family life corresponds to the deepest desires of men and women for lasting happiness and true joy.[2] As sons and daughters of God, we are made for love, for God is love. The family, whose mission is "to guard, reveal and communicate love,"[3] is the common place where God's love is first experienced and the joy of love is made present.

Catholic marriage and family life ministry serves all married couples and families by proclaiming the love of God to them and helping them embrace their vocation to love and discipleship. Inspired primarily by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia,* this document presents a framework of pastoral principles for marriage and family life ministry and advocacy that can serve as a resource to assist pastoral planning in parishes, dioceses or eparchies nationwide. This framework is offered in continuity with the pastoral letter *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*[4] as a practical and pastoral counterpart to the theological principles about marriage that are presented there.

Today, pastoral leaders face the challenge of addressing numerous marital and family situations that are more complex than in previous decades. This framework attempts to present pastoral approaches to many of these situations with the hope that all people "experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that 'fills hearts and lives.'"[5] As Pope Francis indicates, the contemporary issues faced by couples and families require an outreach that is "not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems."[6] Rather, "pastoral care for families 'needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one's dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness.'"[7]

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us that, "The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church."[8] As the bishops of the United States, we renew our commitment to serve all married couples and families in our midst with a renewed pastoral attentiveness.[9] It is our hope that the principles presented here will encourage effective efforts toward a renewal of evangelization in our country. The Church's ministry to and with families is of paramount importance, for, "as the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live."[10] Entrusting this work, therefore, to the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, it is our prayer that families across our country will be renewed, fortified, and inspired by God's plan of love and life.

The Realities of Families Today

The Church's pastoral efforts must "focus on the concrete realities" of family life in every generation.[11] Within our country today, this focus is critical due to the multitude of challenges faced by married couples and families.[12]

> *These include but are not limited to societal influences such as materialism and secularism; individualism and isolation; consumerism and a "throw-away culture"; a culture of permissible promiscuity; frequency of divorce; rising rates of cohabitation; abortion and its tragic consequences; internal struggles within the family unit that run counter to the integrity of the family such as substance abuse and addiction; pornography; many forms of domestic abuse and violence, including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic; prevalent use of contraception and sterilization; infidelity and divorce; civil marriage and remarriage; the trend of delaying marriage and vocational commitment among young adults; the prevalence of children raised without the benefit of a married mother and father; the promotion of ideologies that directly run counter to natural law and church teaching such as same-sex relationships and transgenderism; internal stressors on family life including financial instability, unemployment, sickness, and medical issues; immigration challenges and family separation; and other societal ills that afflict families today: racism, ageism, misogyny, human trafficking, and medical/reproductive technologies that objectify and demean the dignity of life, sexuality, and the human person.*

However, we also see signs of hope and renewed opportunities in this country[13] that remind us that "families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity."[14]

In response to these challenges and encouraged by these opportunities, "it is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning."[15] Rather, we must "seek new forms of missionary creativity" to reach hearts and heal wounds in all families, Catholic and non-Catholic, with a particular sensitivity to the increasingly diverse cultural and ethnic communities in our midst and to those families that are farthest from the Church.[16] Every diocese/eparchy should examine how to meet the unique challenges that their families experience—whether in the Church or territory—and respond to them with renewed creativity and commitment.

Oftentimes, the witness of other families is the best form of evangelization. Forming families to partake in the mission of evangelizing other families is a necessary part of this ministry to families. By the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, Christian families are "the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through 'their joy-filled witness as domestic churches.'"[17] Ministry should prepare and enable families, therefore, to take up their role as agents or evangelizers starting with "evangelization and catechesis inside the family."[18]

Many couples and families bear witness to the joy of faithful love by steadfast commitment and fruitful sacrifice within their daily lives. To them, the Church looks "with inner joy and deep comfort . . . encouraging them and thanking them for the testimony they offer."[19]

Aim and Audience

The purpose of this national pastoral framework, which is an adaptable set of principles and strategies, is to assist dioceses, eparchies, parishes, and all those who serve the family, in responding to the call to proclaim the Gospel of the family, the joy of love, throughout the United States.[20]

The primary audience for whom this framework is intended is Catholic leaders—ordained, consecrated, and lay—who serve and minister to and with families, especially parish and diocesan/eparchial marriage and family life directors. Parishes and dioceses/eparchies should advance an active marriage and family life outreach to couples and families with a trained staff, volunteers, and adequate resources.

Care for married couples and families is an urgent and essential ministry that this framework hopes to serve and support by offering these practical guidelines. **Not all of the strategies suggested in this resource will be possible, nor necessary, to implement; as a framework, it is intended to provide key areas of direction for pastoral planning as the needs of couples and families are evaluated at the local levels by the ordinary or local hierarch and pastoral leaders at the parish and diocesan/eparchial levels.** To assist in this work, supplemental resources will be made available to leaders.

Explanation of Terms

Marriage, Married Couples, Spouses

In this document, "marriage" is used in its global sense to refer to the reality of the life-long union of one man and one woman, as a natural institution rooted in the order of creation. Unless otherwise specified, it also refers to the Sacrament of Marriage contracted between a baptized man and woman.[21] The terms "married/the married couple," "spouse/spouses," and "couples" (unless modified by "engaged"), are used to refer to a man who is a husband and a woman who is a wife.

Family

In most places, this text uses "family" to designate the community, founded on marriage, of father, mother, and children. However, family may also include the extended members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., as dictated by the many cultural realities present in the United States. This document seeks to address the many challenging, but also

culturally rich, marital and family situations that are present in contemporary society such as interreligious marriages, single-parent families, and intercultural families.

Marriage and Family Life Ministry

This form of ministry includes all pastoral care to the engaged, married, and families/family members in their walk of faith. Catholic leaders—ordained, consecrated, and lay—both paid and volunteer who serve and minister to couples preparing for marriage, married couples, and families are designated here as "marriage and family life directors." These leaders may serve at the parish and diocesan/eparchial levels.

In this document, the terms "pastoral leaders" and "parish staff" is intended for all those who serve the parish and diocese/eparchy within specific ministries and areas of pastoral care such as catechists, youth ministry leaders, directors of liturgy, etc. They may be ordained, consecrated, or lay ecclesial ministers.

How to Use This Pastoral Framework

The following pastoral framework presents guidelines that should be adapted according to local needs and priorities in pastoral planning. These guidelines should promote a comprehensive pastoral plan for marriage and family life ministry at the local diocesan/eparchial or parish levels that aims to educate, encourage, and engage the faithful in four core areas or pillars: 1) Prayer and Relationship with Christ; 2) Formation; 3) Accompaniment; and 4) Advocacy.* A "culture of encounter"[22] is a fundamental precondition that must animate and inspire every effort in pastoral care to educate, encourage, and engage couples and families. An effective marriage and family life ministry with a culture of encounter will support and lead families to God's love and mercy.

1. *Educate* – This section addresses the catechetical principles, knowledge, and skills that are a foundational part of pastoral care or needed to impart pastoral care adequately. This is the "what" or foundation for the Church's ministry.
2. *Encourage* – This section addresses areas of encouragement to reinforce principles and meet specific areas of need that may be overlooked. This focuses on the "who," that is, the recipients of education and care, or the pastoral leaders who serve them.

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* NB: This should not be considered as a sequential ordering of priorities nor should the recommendations here be considered as an exhaustive guide or "check-list" for marriage and family life ministry.

3. *Engage* – The third section suggests strategies that may be used to implement the aforementioned principles for the pastoral care of families. These are the "how" or suggested practical steps of implementation.

A Pastoral Framework for Strengthening Marriage and Family Life: Four Pillars

This pastoral framework offers four pillars for marriage and family ministry.[23]

I. Prayer and Relationship with Christ: To foster among the Catholic faithful, in their marriages and families, a living relationship with Jesus Christ by instilling in them a deep appreciation for prayer and the sacramental life.

II. Formation: To encourage human, spiritual, intellectual, and missionary formation that provides a healthy foundation for marriages and families.

III. Accompaniment: To develop pastoral strategies that identify and respond to the realities of married couples, families, and those discerning marriage.

IV. Advocacy: To advance the truths of the human person, marriage, and the family, through advocacy in the public square.

Pillar I. Prayer and Relationship with Christ

> To foster among the Catholic faithful, in their marriages and families, a living relationship with Jesus Christ by instilling in them a deep appreciation for prayer and the sacramental life.

Living the Vocation of Marriage and Family Life

Marriage is the permanent, faithful, and fruitful union of one man and one woman. It is the foundation for the family, an intimate community of persons in "the image of God, who is a communion of persons."[24] The openness of husband and wife to the gift of children reflects the eternal self-giving love of the Father and Son, completed in the Person of the Holy Spirit.[25]

"The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. . . . the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love . . . Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride."[26]

By their communion of life and love, the Christian family should bear witness to their calling of discipleship to everyone around them. A Christian family's life of prayer, service, and witness is

ordered toward their call as "missionary disciples" to be "actively engaged in evangelization,"[27] starting within the home, as parents fulfill their call to be the first and primary educators of the faith. Having first encountered Jesus and his love in the Church, the members of families can then effectively invite other families in need of God's mercy and healing to an encounter with Jesus Christ. In so doing, they act as "the principal agents of the family apostolate"[28] in the New Evangelization.

To assist Christian couples in their calling to form faithful families, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Couples to understand and live the beauty of marriage as a natural institution designed by God.
- Couples to acquire the skills needed to establish and sustain the intimate relationships found in marriage and family life.
- Christian couples and families to discern and pray together about how the Lord is calling them to give witness to Christ and the Gospel, in and through their homes and family life, for the sake of the parish and the larger community.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Christian couples and families to be joy-filled missionary disciples, bearing witness to their faith and vocation[29] while mindful that discipleship is a journey that takes time, effort, and God's grace.
- Couples and families to live out their moral and social responsibilities in their home and parish community.
- The parish community to recognize that they form a "family of families"[30] and as such, recognize their shared call to discipleship and responsibility to care for one another.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Family catechesis on living the vocation of marriage/family life with topics such as prayer, virtue, the lives of the saints, etc.
- Instruction in prayerful discernment for dating couples, engaged couples, married couples, and families.
- Celebratory events and days of reflection or formation for couples and families at the parish or diocesan/eparchial levels.
- Opportunities to volunteer as a family in charitable works, service projects, or forms of evangelization in the community.

- Organized pilgrimages for families to a local holy place or shrine.

The Domestic Church

The home is where husband and wife live the bond of marriage and where parents teach their children to know, love, and serve God. Christian parents, by virtue of their Baptism, are called to bear witness to their faith, especially within the home. The family is the community in which children "learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom."[31] Catholic families should frequently pray together and avail themselves of the sacraments, which is part of developing a family spirituality.[32]

One way to guide Christian families toward an understanding of their calling in God's plan is to help them develop a clear idea of what it means to share together in the "prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ"[33] as a domestic church. This is a profound mystery that should inspire and ennoble family life. Just as the family is the basic cell of society, so too, it is a microcosm of the Church: like the Church, the family joyfully brings new life into the world for God's glory; like the Church, the family is a teacher of the faith and a school of virtue; like the Church, the family reflects the rhythms of prayer ordered in celebration of the liturgical season, daily praise of God, and the Sunday eucharistic celebration; like the Church, the family is the leaven that is sown into the world until all of it rises (see Mt 13:33). Sharing in Christ's own mission, the family through Baptism is "priest, prophet and king"; priest, through the offering of sacrificial love and adoration of God; prophet through the witness to supernatural reality of God's Kingdom; and king, through the order and harmony that the family fosters within the home, community, and Church.

To foster and sustain in families the call to form a domestic church, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Christian couples, especially in the first years of marriage, to deepen their relationship with Christ and one another through prayer; to develop a spiritual life as a couple and as a family through individual, couple, and family prayer; to experience the faith as a source of familial warmth that unifies and attracts.
- Christian families to understand and embrace their particular calling as a domestic church and their responsibility to missionary discipleship.[34]

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Catholic families to frequently encounter the Word of God and the Eucharist as sources of life and spirituality; to develop strong family rituals and traditions; to make Sacred Scripture accessible in their home and display works of holy art and imagery such as a crucifix and an icon or image of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

- Adults and parents who are on the margins of belief by introducing small group formation that awakens a living faith and a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

- Catholic organizations, ecclesial movements, associations of the faithful, and secular institutes to assist these parents and families in forming authentic discipleship and a family spirituality.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Days of celebration and formation such as "Domestic Church Days" for families at the parish or diocesan/eparchial levels; may include prayer, catechesis, children's activities, workshops, and entertainment for the whole family.
- Retreats for spouses and/or families with opportunities for confession and spiritual direction; may include an opportunity for a family consecration (e.g., Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Joseph, Holy Family, etc.).
- Small group family seminars and rosary groups, bible discussion, and gatherings of couples for mutual support and enrichment.
- Specific preaching offered on appropriate feast days that highlight marriage and family life; scheduled visit to parish families with a blessing of the home.

Pillar II. Formation

To encourage human, intellectual, spiritual, and missionary formation that provide a healthy foundation for marriages and families.

Everything that a person learns and experiences affects their formation and therefore contributes to, or inhibits, their readiness for marriage and family life. In a particular way, the family is the primary context for the healthy formation of children, with the father and mother as their primary educators. Formation is essential for the preparation of good discipleship in all God's people. It primarily "consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma*."[35]

Marriage and family life ministry can address formation in the following four categories: human, spiritual, intellectual, and missionary. These categories, which mirror ministerial leadership formation, have been adapted to focus on the formation of married couples and families, with some reference to pastoral leaders.[36]

Human Formation

Human formation can be described as "a three-fold process of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-gift."[37] It is God's grace at work in the human person that builds on nature and prepares men and women for the vocation to marriage and the responsibility of parenting. A strong human formation enables a person to make a generous gift of self, which, with God's grace, creates a communion of persons.

> *Human formation is enhanced by all that is good, true, and beautiful. Anything that contributes to the well-being of the human body and spirit is formative.*
>
> *To lay a solid foundation for the commitments of marriage, formation may aim to develop: character; affective maturity; self-discipline, self-respect, respect for life and respect for others; solidarity and the common good; healthy interdependence; interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills, etc.*

To foster human formation, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Men and women on the distinctive gifts of masculinity and femininity that demonstrate the complementarity of man and woman and richly contribute to marriage and family life.
- Parents and families to understand that Jesus Christ is the foundation of our human identity. He, alone, "fully reveals man to man himself."[38]
- Youth, young adults, and engaged couples on the dignity of the human person as not dependent upon external qualities, but rather, on one's creation in the image of God.
- Ministry leaders in effective forms of accompaniment. This includes listening and assessing the unique needs presented to them by couples and families. They should be attentive to and aware of relational wounds (e.g., divorce, domestic violence, etc.) and other obstacles (e.g., addictions in the family, economic hardship, etc.), that may affect the people to whom they minister and inhibit healthy human formation or require expert attention.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Men and women to recognize and embrace their respective identities and vocations as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers.
- Parents, families, youth, and young adults to pursue all that contributes to a healthy, wholesome, and holistic human formation and to discern how their charisms, gifts, and talents can be placed at the service of the parish community and beyond.
- Catholic schools and institutions of higher education as well as Catholic publishers to provide or produce sound Christian formation programs to various age groups.

- Lay associations, ecclesial movements, ministries, and apostolates that promote the healthy Christian formation of men and women and reinforce the specific calling to fatherhood and motherhood.[39]

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities to experience and support the fine arts, sciences, and cultural events as a parish community; activities that support the social and economic well-being of families in the local community.
- Pastoral programming that promotes authentic Christian anthropology with an emphasis on the unique gifts of men and women; the healthy formation of men and women; and the specific calling to motherhood and fatherhood as a foundational and noble vocation.
- Age-appropriate classes, workshops, and resources on the Christian vision of love, human sexuality, and chastity, which allow for the cultivation of authentic relationships and a respect for the gift of life.
- Referrals to qualified counselors whose work assists authentic Christian human formation.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the beginning and continuation of the first pillar (Pillar I. Prayer and Relationship with Christ), which fosters growth in a person's relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through prayer, Sacred Scripture, and the sacramental life. Spiritual formation calls for an ongoing conversion of heart in all missionary disciples.

> *Spiritual formation may aim to develop a deepening conversion of life; personal prayer; a knowledge of Sacred Scripture; a well-formed conscience; trust in God and growth in virtue; regular reception of the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist; familiarity with the saints and writings of the Doctors of the Church; participation in the Christian community and service to those in need; spiritual practices for marriage and family life; missionary discipleship, etc.*

To facilitate spiritual formation, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- The faithful in age-appropriate ways with catechesis, founded upon a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Formation in the faith should include

- A knowledge of Sacred Scripture—how the Bible is organized, the metanarrative of salvation history, and how to prayerfully read and meditate upon the Word of God as the foundation of a personal prayer life;
- How to pray—types of prayer, Catholic prayer traditions, and progressive growth in prayer;
- The sacraments—their meaning, importance, and how to fruitfully participate in them.

- Parents in their primary responsibility of providing spiritual formation to their children, especially by way of example in living the faith, praying together, and preparing their children to receive the sacraments at the appropriate time.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Catholic schools, religious education programs, youth ministry, and young adult ministry programs to offer opportunities for families and young people to develop a personal relationship with God and grow in their personal appropriation of the faith.
- Catholic ministries, lay associations, ecclesial movements, and apostolates that promote the spiritual formation of the faithful.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities that foster an encounter with Jesus Christ and formation in discipleship such as parish missions, retreats, spiritual exercises, small groups of *lectio divina*, and times of reflection; devotions that encourage meditation and contemplation such as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Stations of the Cross, and the recitation of the Holy Rosary, etc.
- Use of age-appropriate curricula and resources for catechesis, adult faith formation, and Catholic schools that demonstrate the reasons for our faith and emphasize how a life of faith is founded on a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Intellectual Formation

Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey of faith seeking understanding, as shaped by one's life experience. Intellectual formation fosters confidence to move from childlike faith to that of an adult in Christ (see 1 Cor 13:11). By recognizing the coherence of faith and reason, Christians can more easily conform their lives to God's truth. Knowledge and understanding of both the natural institution of marriage and the Sacrament of Marriage informs the consent of spouses and provides them with a vision of marriage and family life according to God's plan.

Intellectual formation may include developing or understanding critical thinking skills; the coherence of faith and reason; the proclamation of the Good News or kerygma*; catechesis*

on the truths of the Catholic faith as revealed by God and handed on through Sacred Scripture and Tradition; Christian anthropology and God's plan for marriage and family; and the history of the Church and Catholic social teaching, especially on issues that impact the well-being of families, etc.

To facilitate intellectual formation, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Youth, young adults, and parents to grow in their understanding of the faith and to discover the depth of the Church's teaching on marriage, family life, and human sexuality, with an emphasis on the Theology of the Body as inspired by the teachings of St. John Paul II.
- Christian/Catholic couples and families on the *kerygma* and catechetical foundations of the faith;[40] the beauty and truth of marriage as a natural institution with fundamental ends or purposes;[41] the sacramentality of Christian marriage; and the Church's social teaching on issues that affect the well-being of families.[42]

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Families by developing resources and programs that seek to make the home a place where intentional moments of education, listening, and sharing the faith occur (e.g., family meals, discussions, story times, daily gospel readings, etc.); parents to limit the use of social media, television, and other technology that impedes family relationships, communication, and personal interactions.
- Catholic schools, religious education programs, youth ministry, and young adult ministry programs to develop and utilize age-appropriate curricula that express the natural institution of marriage and the sacramental reality of Christian marriage; to develop and utilize age-appropriate curricula that express authentic teaching on human sexuality; and to help young people understand Catholic social teaching on issues that affect the well-being of families.
- Catholic organizations, lay associations, ecclesial movements, and apostolates to take an active role in the intellectual formation of their members and those they serve.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities such as classes, lectures, and online courses for faith formation at all age levels, especially adult formation.
- Seminars, classes, and resources on the meaning and unique role of marriage and family as described above.
- Ongoing training and formation opportunities for marriage and family life directors.

Missionary Formation

Missionary formation includes an awareness of the call to missionary discipleship and presupposes human, spiritual, and intellectual formation. Missionary formation provides the vision, understanding, and support to live out Christ's mission in and through marriage and family life. It prepares Christian married couples and their families to radiate God's love to the world.[43]

> *Missionary formation includes any skills used in ministry such as active listening, speaking, mentoring, pedagogy, management, or leadership. This formation in skills is intended for all lay ecclesial ministers and pastoral leaders as well as Christian couples and families called to become agents of evangelization in and through family life, etc.*

To facilitate missionary formation, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Engaged and married couples to live the mission of marriage in service of life and love in their domestic church for the benefit of society, the Church, and the glory of God.
- Christian/Catholic families to understand that evangelization and service calls for families to be "leaven" in the world—among extended family, friends, neighbors, the parish, and the larger community, both local and global—by conforming their actions to the foundational principles of Catholic social teaching, especially those that regard the well-being of marriage and family life.[44]

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Parish staff to recruit families who can share their talents and expertise in various ministries.[45]
- Catholic married couples and families to serve in their parish and larger community, particularly by reaching out to the disaffiliated and those on the peripheries.
- Educators and leaders in Catholic schools, religious education programs, and in programs of youth, campus, and young adult ministries to help young people understand their purpose in life and God's call to radiate his love to others.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities for Christian families to participate in evangelization and outreach, including apostolates and service ministries that work with those who experience poverty or suffering.
- Resources for Catholic parents to help their children live the faith as missionary disciples.

- Training in leadership skills such as active listening, communication, mentoring, pedagogy, or management for ministry leaders.
- Support for lay associations, ecclesial movements, ministries, and apostolates that offer forms of service, discipleship, and pastoral resources.

Pillar III. Accompaniment

To develop pastoral strategies that identify and respond to the realities of married couples, families, and those discerning marriage.

Today, marriage and family life are often complex realities. Many marriages are mixed (between a Catholic and a Christian from another denomination), interreligious, intercultural, or interracial. Families may include children of different parents or backgrounds.

"Nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are" and leading them to the Lord.[46] Many people struggle with the hardships of divorce, mental or chronic illness, addictions, domestic violence, or poverty, among others. In addition, many married couples and families live without the close presence and support of their extended families.

These realities call for sensitivity to the varied experiences of families and to shape programs and resources with care and compassion to help all families grow in the love of God and neighbor. When pastoral leaders reach out in the "art of accompaniment," couples and families in need should experience "our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life."[47]

In many situations, the complexities of family life may call for healing. Marriage and family life ministry should be prepared to bring Christ's healing and redeeming presence to couples and families in a variety of situations, reaching out with humility and compassion to help them overcome obstacles in their lives. [48]

The pastoral strategies of accompaniment suggested here are among the many ways that the Church can be "a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy."[49]

Accompaniment can take the form of personal presence, care, and compassion. It may also mean providing support, practical resources, and referrals for professional assistance. The steady, patient, compassionate accompaniment that a follower of Christ offers another person invites him or her "to let themselves be healed, to take up their mat, embrace the cross, leave all behind and go forth ever anew to proclaim the Gospel" (Evangelii

Gaudium, no. 172) and then to accompany others as missionary disciples (see EG, no. 173).

Accompaniment in Marriage Preparation

Preparing Children and Youth for Marriage: Remote Marriage Preparation

It is primarily through his or her experience of family that a young person absorbs a blueprint regarding interpersonal relationships, love, marriage, and family life. "Children appreciate the love and care of their parents, they give importance to family bonds, and they hope to succeed in forming a family when it is their time."[50] Extended family, friends, parishes, schools, the local community, media, and society all contribute, in varying degrees, to remote preparation for marriage.

To strengthen remote marriage preparation for children and youth (0-18 years old), a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Children and youth to appreciate and respect the human person, made in the image of God as male and female, and the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit; on the meaning of love as wanting and doing the good for another to the point of sacrifice, as modeled by Jesus Christ.
- Youth on the distinction between lust and love; on the right use of sexuality according to one's state in life; on the reasons for why engagement in sexual pleasure is exclusive to the married state; on fertility awareness and how God has provided natural means by which married couples may achieve or postpone pregnancy; on the dignity of persons with same-sex attraction while explaining the immorality and disorder of physical acts of homosexual expression; on the dignity of persons with gender dysphoria while explaining why so-called "gender affirming" hormonal and surgical interventions are immoral and harmful.[51]
- Parents in their responsibility to form in their children an appreciation for the integration of virtues such as modesty and purity of heart and address challenges that may arise in adolescence such as pornography, inappropriate sexual behavior, and other forms of disrespect for the dignity of the human person.
- Parents, educators, catechists, and youth ministry leaders on how to advance an integral program of formation for children and youth (as described in Pillar II. Formation) that is age-appropriate, preferably in collaboration with one another.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Parents in their responsibility as the primary witnesses of virtue and fidelity to God's plan of marriage and family life, made manifest especially by their relationship with each other.

- Clergy to preach effectively about the inherent dignity of man and woman and the beauty of marriage and family life by God's design.[52]
- Catholic educators and catechists to select programs and curricula, that provide sound formation in discipleship, the baptismal vocation to holiness, a life of prayer, and an age-appropriate understanding of the Church's teaching on the human person. Programs and curricula should also be evaluated for appeal and accessibility to families.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Robust and age-appropriate curricula in Catholic schools, faith formation classes, and programs in youth ministry that provide sound teaching on the following: Christian anthropology, the nature of authentic human sexuality, the Cardinal Virtues and the virtues of modesty and chastity, the formation of healthy relationships, and the call to marriage and family life. Age-appropriate resources on the same topics should be offered jointly, to both parents and young people.
- Lay associations, ecclesial movements, ministries, and apostolates that advance the sound formation of children and youth.

Preparing Young Adults for Marriage: Proximate Marriage Preparation

Proximate marriage preparation continues through young adulthood and extends to engagement.[53] Pope Francis reminds us that "young people intensely feel the call to love; they dream of meeting the right person with whom they can form a family and build a life together."[54] At the same time, many young people are faced with fear and uncertainty for the future. By making "a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family,"[55] young people will more easily recognize the beauty of life-long marriage and dedication to family. Accompaniment, vocational discernment, and chastity education are all essential elements in this phase.[56]

To strengthen proximate marriage preparation for young adults (19-39 years old), a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Young adults to recognize the beauty of God's plan for human sexuality that is deserving of awe and respect; to honor and uphold the institution of marriage as a natural good for society and, for Christians, raised to the dignity of a sacrament.
- Catechists and teachers in Catholic institutions of higher education, parishes, and campus ministry programs to offer instruction that clearly presents the reasons for the Church's teaching on human sexuality, marriage, the moral regulation of birth, and respect for life

while thoroughly addressing contemporary questions and challenges with loving compassion.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Single and dating young adults to grow in "self-knowledge, developing the greater virtues, particularly love, patience, openness to dialogue, and helping others,"[57] as a necessary part of preparation for engagement and marriage.
- Campus and young adult ministers to foster in young adults an understanding of and appreciation for wholesome dating habits and the observance of chastity.[58]

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Coordinated and integrated efforts between ministry with young adults and family life ministry, "with the aim of ensuring a continuous and suitable accompaniment of the vocational process."[59] This may include opportunities for mentorship and networks of other vocational support.
- Programs in parishes and Catholic institutions of higher education that help young adults understand and discern healthy and moral dating behaviors; that compare and contrast God's plan for marriage and family with contemporary false sexual ideas and behaviors that harm marriage.
- Curricula in faith formation classes, young adult ministry programs, and Catholic institutions of higher education that address authentic human sexuality, the nature of marriage, and the blessing of children. Church teaching on these topics should be presented along with biological, psychological, and sociological data.

Preparing Engaged Couples for Marriage: Immediate Marriage Preparation

Immediate marriage preparation begins when a man and a woman decide to marry. This preparation ought to be "[a] synthesis of the previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral and spiritual content, thus filling in eventual gaps in basic formation"[60] (see areas addressed in Pillar II. Formation). Many couples, however, present themselves for marriage lacking formation in one or more of these areas.

Marriage preparation should provide engaged couples "with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family."[61] It is itself, "a journey of faith" and an opportunity for Christian couples to "recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state."[62] It should also offer "practical programs, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance. All of this calls for a pedagogy of love, attuned to the feelings and needs of young people and capable of helping

them to grow interiorly."[63] Moreover, it is important that the Church's teaching on marriage be explained in its integrity and be "embodied by faithful married couples who bear convincing witness to its truth."[64] Above all, marriage preparation is an opportunity for the evangelization or re-evangelization of the couple and a summons to a life of faith and holiness.

Some couples may already be in a civilly recognized union and seek to be married in the Church. These couples should be prepared adequately and the options made known to them.

To assist this effort, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Engaged couples on the seriousness of marriage as a covenant of the whole of life, ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and mentor or sponsor couples on the art of accompaniment[65] as an essential part of preparing couples for marriage.[66]

ENCOURAGE . . .

- The parish community to welcome and support engaged couples. Married couples in the parish should be adequately trained to serve as witnesses and mentors for engaged couples, with attention to the cultural needs of the couple.
- Catechists and educators to evaluate and select marriage preparation programs that offer a robust catechesis on marriage and the four areas of formation discussed in Pillar II.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Ongoing training and formation for pastoral leaders who assist with the preparation of couples for marriage, including clergy, seminarians, mentor couples, parish staff, and volunteers.
- Workshops in Natural Family Planning (NFP) instruction for teacher training and couple/client education. A diocesan approved list of NFP education options should be provided to parishes.
- Robust marriage preparation programs that include content on the formation principles outlined in Pillar II, as well as
    - The nature of marriage as instituted by God;
    - The vocation of marriage and its responsibilities;
    - How to pray together as a couple;
    - The role of Christian spouses as witnesses to the charity that flows from Christ;[67]

- Living conjugal chastity as a virtue with particular admonition to cohabiting couples;[68]
- The responsibility of Catholic parents to have their children baptized and raised in the Catholic faith and to build the domestic church as ministers of their home;
- Natural Family Planning as a tool for respecting and living God's design for married love while discerning God's will for the size of their family;[69]
- Moral teaching of the Church on reproductive technologies and ethical solutions to infertility;
- Sensitive issues such as pornography use and addiction, resolving abortion trauma, sexual and domestic abuse and violence, the experience of separation and divorce in one's family of origin, etc.;
- Practical skills such as communication, financial planning, etc.;
- Requirements for marriage in accord with the law of the Church.

- Outreach to engaged couples so they are connected with the local parish community and supported by a mentor or sponsor couple.
- Practical and moral support for cohabiting couples to encourage and facilitate a transition into separate housing as they strive to remain chaste in preparation for marriage.
- Opportunities of prayer with and for engaged couples, such as the Blessing of the Engaged Couple or Rite of Betrothal, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacrament of Penance,[70] etc.
- Pre-marital inventories to identify the needs of the couple and ensure adequate time for conversations, discernment, and follow up, with appropriate referrals as needed.

Accompaniment in Marriage

Accompanying Married Couples in the First Few Years

The first few years of marriage are critical to the life of a married couple. It is important to remind newly married couples that the wedding is just the beginning of a journey marked by joys and challenges. Christian couples should be reminded to draw upon the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony in times of need.[71] The Church is obliged to assist couples at all times, but they should be especially assisted during this time of transition and change.[72]

To strengthen new marriages and cultivate the joy of love,[73] a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Newly married couples with Post-Cana formation, which may include continuing education on topics such as the vocation of marriage and the call to holiness, establishing family prayer, rituals, and traditions within the home, marital communication skills, work-home balance, Natural Family Planning, etc.

- Mentor couples with guidance on how to continue to accompany newly married couples.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Newly married couples to engage in parish life and to meet other new couples for support and faith sharing.
- The extended families of newly married couples and the surrounding parish community to support them in their early stages of marriage as they navigate new challenges.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Post-Cana programs that include further instruction on the theology of the vocation of marriage and the call to holiness as a married couple.
- Mentoring programs that pair the newly married with faithful and mature couples for support and direction.
- Parish or diocesan/eparchial programs where small groups of the newly married can be gathered for peer support and faith sharing.
- First anniversary celebrations or retreats hosted for new couples in the parish or diocese/eparchy.

Ongoing Marriage Enrichment

Ongoing marriage enrichment is essential for couples to grow in virtue and to cherish the gift that they are to one another. Married life is enhanced and enriched through the years by the faithful, fruitful gift that the spouses make to one another day by day.

To enrich married life, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Married couples to build and strengthen skills that will help their marriages thrive such as communication and conflict resolution, parenting, good financial habits, Natural Family Planning, etc.
- Pastoral leaders to recognize the ongoing needs of married couples at all stages of life, recognizing key moments of ministry as opportunities for evangelization.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Married couples and their families by recognition at events in parish and diocesan/eparchial settings, especially couples celebrating milestone anniversaries.

- The parish community to support married couples throughout the whole life cycle as they transition through the different phases of married life.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Development of like-for-like ministries that meet the ongoing needs of married couples.
- Skill-building programs such as communication and conflict resolution, parenting, finance handling and planning, Natural Family Planning, etc., to help couples navigate potential areas of marital tension.
- Opportunities for couples to reflect at retreats, in small groups, etc.
- Support for marriage and family life focused ministries, apostolates, organizations, programs, and resources at the parish and diocesan/eparchial levels.

Living Conjugal Chastity

Chastity in marriage enables husband and wife to respect each other as well as God's gifts of life and love. Conjugal chastity, a sign of marital fidelity,[74] opposes any behavior that may harm the integrity of the person and the gift of life. It helps husband and wife to mature as individuals and as a couple, enabling them to make a sincere gift of self.

> *Contemporary threats to conjugal chastity come in many forms and may contribute to the breakdown of the family. They include infidelity, contraceptive use, direct sterilization, illicit reproductive technologies, abortion, participating in and use of pornography, sex addiction, forms of sexual abuse, etc. Many couples come to marriage already having been sexually intimate with each other or with other people before their marriages and have likely used contraception, pornography, or been involved in an abortion. Moreover, modern dating has been conditioned or replaced by a culture of promiscuity where sexual intercourse has lost its meaning. This has resulted in a distorted understanding of God's plan for human sexuality and yielded relational wounds.*

To support conjugal chastity, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Married couples by proclaiming the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person, the beauty of human sexuality, and the call to live chastely according to one's state in life.[75]
- Married couples to address and avoid threats to conjugal chastity such as contraception, pornography, abusive behavior, etc.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Married couples to have recourse to mercy and healing by offering pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and, for Catholic spouses, the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Married couples to seek out apostolates and organizations that support and sustain the healthy re-kindling of chaste love.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Healing services and opportunities for Catholic married couples to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Small group discussions, workshops, or professionally facilitated sessions on the threats to conjugal chastity, especially pornography.[76]
- Comprehensive list of local resources or counsellors that address particular situations in accordance with church teaching.

Supporting Married Couples in Welcoming New Life

Married love by its nature is ordered toward the procreation and education of children and the good of the spouses. Difficulties experienced in their families of origin may lead young couples to ask whether it is "worthwhile to start a new family, to be faithful, to be generous."[77] Couples should be encouraged to recognize that "the best incentives to mature and the greatest joys to experience and share"[78] can be found in a family.

Cooperating with God in bringing children into the world and forming them through education "mirrors God's creative work."[79] It is a responsibility that should be shared by the mother and father, both of whom provide specific, unique gifts to their child.[80] Married couples who welcome new life into the world should be encouraged and sustained by the Church in every way possible.

To help married couples be open to the gift of children, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Couples on the gift of children as the fruit of the marital act and the supreme gift of marriage; on how to discern and pray together for openness to life; and on the Church's moral teaching about the transmission of life.
- The parish community on the Church's teachings regarding the gift and beauty of human sexuality and the importance of respect for all life, at all stages.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Couples who are adjusting to pregnancy and new parenting to embrace the joy of motherhood and fatherhood.[81]
- Working mothers and fathers by recognizing the challenges that accompany these situations and offering flexible working arrangements and pro-family policies in the workplace, as well as adaptable ministry schedules and worship times, as needed.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Parish and diocesan/eparchial pro-life events that foster respect for life in the womb. Within the context of an event or Mass, the Rite of Blessing a Child in the Womb may also be celebrated with expectant mothers.[82]
- Collaboration with and support for services that assist difficult pregnancies such as pro-life pregnancy centers and adoption agencies.
- A review of all parish and diocesan/eparchial programs, ministries, and policies to ensure a consistent awareness and response to the needs of families.[83]
- Flexible working arrangements for mothers and fathers who serve the Church.
- Affordable daycare or babysitting services at the parish or diocesan/eparchial center that are compliant with diocesan/eparchial child protection policies.
- Family-supportive facilities and/or arrangements that assist the participation of parents with young children at Mass or other liturgical celebrations.
- Comprehensive lists of trusted resources:
    - Adoption and foster care services
    - Pregnancy centers
    - Medical professionals and counselors dedicated to assisting couples in accordance with Catholic teaching

Accompanying Married Couples in Crisis

At times, husbands and wives enter marriage with serious emotional or spiritual wounds. Even within strong marriages, spouses can harm one another, possibly leading to deep unhappiness and marital distress. Trained marriage coaches or professional counselors may be critical to helping spouses through a crisis. In crisis situations, spouses can learn how to navigate difficulties and acquire skills, treating each new crisis as "an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married."[84]

To help couples in crisis and foster healing, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Married couples to know how the clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff are willing and able to help them through marital distress.
- Clergy and pastoral leaders on how to offer assistance based on the individual needs of the couple.
- The community of faithful to recognize and respond appropriately when someone is struggling in their marriage. Couples in the parish may be selected to mentor and assist couples in crisis.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Married couples who are struggling in their marriage to seek out spiritual support and advice from clergy or a trained marriage coach, and/or seek professional counseling to address the concerns or root causes of the crisis.
- Married couples in the parish community to become marriage mentors or trained marriage coaches for the benefit of couples in the parish.
- Marriage counselors and experts to offer assistance on a sliding fee scale, or pro bono, when necessary and appropriate.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Network of mentor couples in the parish who can accompany married couples with prayer, friendship, and other forms of support.
- Trained marriage coaches at the parish or diocesan/eparchial levels who can provide professional help to struggling couples.
- Opportunities for renewal and retreats offered by ecclesial movements, ministries, and apostolates dedicated to marriage ministry and renewal.
- Materials and resources that provide guidance and encouragement to couples in crisis.
- Comprehensive list of vetted marriage counselors in the local area; collaborative relationships between parishes and counselors with the help of the diocese/eparchy.

Accompanying Couples Who Are Separated or Divorced

The situation of separation or divorce is a source of pain for the spouses and oftentimes is traumatic for the entire family, especially for children. A new family may emerge as a result, formed by new parents and siblings such as stepfamilies or half-siblings, etc. The Church offers these blended families an opportunity to heal from wounds and grow spiritually with the grace of God.

To reach and care for separated or divorced individuals and their families, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Couples affected by separation or divorce with counsel for reconciliation and instruction on the purpose and processes of obtaining a declaration of nullity, if necessary.
- Children of separated or divorced couples on their inherent dignity as sons and daughters of God and their belonging to the Church as the family of God's people.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff on ways to assist separated and divorced individuals, and their families, ever responsive to their needs and situations as they arise. Discernment of how best to assist the affected spouses should also consider whether the spouse is the victim of abandonment, involuntary divorce, or abuse.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Separated or divorced persons in their journeys by listening to their stories as well as to the children affected by these situations. Help them know that the Church is ready to provide support and the gift of God's grace.
- Blended families and family members with opportunities to be integrated into the parish community.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff, to recognize and respect the sensitivities and complexities that families affected by divorce and separation may experience.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Ministries that provide pastoral care for those experiencing separation or divorce as well as for children and adult children affected by divorce and separation.
- Training sessions for clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff in the rules of faithful discernment and the logic of mercy in truth, in order to respond sensitively to the needs of blended families.[85]
- Resources that address the various issues involved in separation or divorce, particularly its effects on mental health, children, finances, etc.
- Informational events on the applicable canonical processes.

Accompanying Couples Toward Marriage in the Church: Convalidation

The Church welcomes and rejoices in a couple's pursuit of a valid marriage. Where convalidation is possible, it is not a "blessing" of an existing union, but rather a new, free act of consent to marriage in the Lord. As such, couples who have been civilly married and seek

convalidation should participate in marriage preparation with an emphasis, in the case of Christian couples, on the sacramentality of marriage. This time is also an opportunity for the Catholic spouse to reinforce regular reception of the sacraments and faith formation for the whole family.

To accompany couples toward convalidation, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Adults in faith formation classes and parents of children in catechesis on the meaning of convalidation by the Church and offer guidance through the process.
- Clergy and parish staff to assist couples living in an irregular situation by beginning a conversation about whether and how their marriages can be regularized.[86]

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Couples who may have received convalidation to serve as mentors and provide support and guidance to couples seeking convalidation.
- Catholic organizations and ecclesial movements that offer marriage support and enrichment, to speak of the possibility of convalidation to their members.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adult faith formation classes and/or information sessions on the sacramentality of marriage and the canonical process of convalidation. Diocesan/eparchial canonists may assist with these classes.
- Catholic marriage programs, ministries, and resources that support and assist civilly married couples through the convalidation process.

Accompanying Families and Family Members at Every Stage of Life

Accompanying Parents as They Raise and Educate Their Children

The Church has a responsibility to assist parents in their role as primary educators of their children by catechizing parents in the basic tenets of the Catholic faith and instructing them on how to pass on those teachings to their children. "The home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbor."[87] Parents are charged with the responsibility of guiding their children to the truth even into adulthood.

To assist parents, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Parents on effective ways to teach and exemplify the love of God and neighbor; growth in virtue; respect for all human life and God's creation; the gift of human sexuality; the teachings of the Catholic Church; love for the Word of God; the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness, etc.
- Clergy, educators, catechists, and other pastoral leaders to understand their role of co-responsibility for the well-being of children and their education, fully respecting the parents' role as primary educators. At the same time, parents should be educated to respect fully the authority, rights, and obligations of the diocesan/eparchial bishop and parish pastor in the catechetical formation of children.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Parents to participate regularly in the celebration of the Mass and other liturgical services as a family and to avail frequently of the sacraments. It is opportune to instruct parents on their responsibility for the Christian education[88] of their children during sacramental preparation, especially baptismal preparation. At Baptism, the role of godparents should also be explained and upheld.
- Catholic educational leaders to make Catholic education accessible by providing tuition waivers, scholarships, and financial aid to families in need.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Family catechesis tailored to various family sizes and ages.
- Appropriate childcare and children's programming at parish and diocesan/eparchial events.
- Parish and diocesan/eparchial support for the parental choice of education: home-based, classical, private Catholic, Catholic diocesan, hybrid, etc.
- Financial assistance for families in need who wish to attend Catholic schools, in collaboration with parish, diocesan/eparchial, and school administrations.
- Effective, engaging, and affordable catechetical programs for children.

Accompanying Couples Who Are Unable to Conceive a Child

Many couples experience infertility. Couples without children or who experience infertility should be helped to recognize that there are many ways to experience a fruitfulness that "makes God's love present in society."[89] These couples can draw strength and consolation from uniting their wound of infertility with the Lord's Cross.

To accompany couples unable to conceive children, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Couples on the manifold ways that fruitfulness is made possible by their marriage.
- Couples with instruction in Natural Family Planning methods and the ethics of assisted reproductive technologies, explaining what the Church teaches and why.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to be mindful of spouses without children who are part of the parish community.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Couples to pray and discern the form of marital fruitfulness that God may be asking of them such as adoption or foster care.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to care for couples sensitively and invite them to take an active part in the parish community.
- The parish community to recognize couples affected by infertility as life-bearing members of the family of God and to welcome their unique gifts.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Instruction for couples to learn about and avail themselves of the natural and morally acceptable means of infertility treatment; parish faith formation on Catholic moral teaching and the ethics of assisted reproductive technologies, such as in-vitro fertilization.
- Guidance for couples to discern the many forms of marital fruitfulness such as adoption and foster care.
- Pastoral outreach events for couples without children such as special liturgies, prayer events, small faith-sharing groups, and retreats; facilitation of network-building with other couples in the same situation.
- Comprehensive list of trusted resources:
    - Adoption and foster care services
    - Medical professionals who assist infertile couples in morally acceptable ways according to church teaching
    - Local classes in fertility awareness
    - Experts who can offer spiritual direction and emotional counseling in light of church teaching

Accompanying Couples Who Have Lost a Family Member, Especially a Child

The loss of any close family member, especially a child, may be a source of tremendous pain, grief, and distress. A pastoral response should provide compassionate support and assistance to meet the needs of the family.

To accompany a grieving family, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Grieving parents and families on what the Church teaches regarding circumstances such as miscarriage, infant death, and suicide, as well as on forgiveness/vengeance and the hope of the Resurrection.
- Pastoral leaders and parish staff to meet the needs of the family with professionalism and compassion.
- Parish communities on how to respond to death as Christians, the stages of grieving, and how their moral and spiritual support sustains those who grieve.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Grieving families with the grace of the sacraments, counsel, and other forms of support. This time of loss is also an opportunity to gently evangelize family members and invite them to return to the sacraments and to the life of the parish.
- Christian couples, parents, and families to recognize and share in the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection.[90]
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to work compassionately with grieving families and to express God's merciful love.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Training for pastoral leaders and parish staff to assist grieving parents and family members (e.g., the process of planning the Christian funeral and burial, meals and financial help, etc.).
- Parish and diocesan/eparchial educational events focused on how to cope with death and the stages of grieving.
- Opportunities for grieving families to meet other families who have experienced loss for mutual support and comfort.
- Comprehensive list of counselors for spiritual and emotional support.

Accompanying Single Adults

Single adults make significant contributions to their families of origin and to the larger family of the Church. "For those who are not called to marriage or the consecrated life, it must always be remembered that the first and most important vocation is the vocation we have received in baptism. Those who are single, even if not by their own choice, can offer a particular witness to that vocation through their own path of personal growth."[91] Single adults have a variety of pastoral needs that should be attended to in marriage and family life ministry.

To accompany single people, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Single adults by helping them recognize the Lord's call to prayer and service in their present circumstances.
- Single men and women to an awareness of vocational discernment with the help of spiritual direction and attention to one's relationship to Christ.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Single people to share their gifts and talents through service within their extended families, at the parish, and in the community.
- Married couples and parish families to be mindful of single adults and to welcome them into their lives in a variety of ways.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Parish and diocesan/eparchial sponsored events for single adults to encourage fellowship.
- Opportunities for vocational discernment and spiritual growth.
- Programs and resources for single adults (e.g., financial planning, respite care for family members, etc.) in a parish or diocese/eparchy.

Accompanying the Widow or Widower

The loss of a spouse can cause deep sorrow for the widow or widower whose life is changed from that moment. The Church should make every effort as a family of faith to sustain the person experiencing loss.

To assist and support widows and widowers, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Widows and widowers of the ways in which they can intercede for the soul of their loved one by means of prayer, Mass offerings, and works of mercy.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to be mindful of the widows and widowers in their midst and invite them to participate in parish events in meaningful ways.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Widows and widowers to undertake volunteer work or perform spiritual and corporal works of mercy to enrich their life in new ways.
- Families of widows and widowers, as well as the larger church family, to welcome and incorporate them more actively into their lives and the events of the parish.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities for widows and widowers in the parish and diocese/eparchy to meet and gather for mutual support.
- Lay associations, ecclesial movements, ministries, and apostolates that can provide spiritual and moral support to widows and widowers as well as tend to their physical or financial needs, especially if young children are involved.

Accompanying Grandparents and the Elderly

The elderly desire and deserve not to be ignored, abandoned, or rejected.[92] Loneliness, as a result of distance and isolation, is frequently experienced by the elderly. Elder members of the family and community should be appreciated and valued as vital members who are essential to the family and society.

Many elderly persons are grandparents (although not exclusively) who serve as "a vital link in the relationship between generations"[93] by passing on their faith, traditions, and wisdom. Today, many grandparents also bear full or partial responsibility for their grandchildren. The Church should support them in this undertaking and sustain families that are intergenerational.

To support the elderly and the role of grandparenting, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Grandparents to better understand their important role of transmitting and forming the faith of their grandchildren and the community at large.
- Families to recognize, appreciate, and respect the elder members in their midst as they age.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Families to offer housing, support, and assistance to their elder members, recognizing changing needs as parents age, and to include them in family gatherings and celebrations.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to offer a parish-based ministry for grandparents to encourage them in their transmission of the faith and to be mindful of the elderly in pastoral planning and parish events.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities to recognize and honor the elderly and/or grandparents by planning intergenerational gatherings where young and old can encounter one another in meaningful ways.
- Activities that involve the elderly and/or grandparents at Catholic schools and religious education/faith formation programs as a way for them to share their knowledge and love of the faith.
- Outreach to the elderly in assisted living facilities and senior care centers, ensuring that they have regular access to the sacraments and are visited and cared for by members of the parish community.
- Training opportunities for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and other volunteers to provide for the various physical, material, and spiritual needs of the elderly.

Accompanying Caregivers of Family Members

Caring for a family member who is chronically or mentally ill, aging, disabled, or infirm is a true form of service and charity. By caring for each other, spouses honor their vows and families demonstrate the bonds of familial love despite the emotional, physical, and spiritual demands of caregiving.

To support caregivers who reflect Christ's healing love, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Families on the meaning of human suffering and God's plan of redemption and on the beauty and richness of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick—not only in final moments—but throughout the caregiving journey.
- Families and the faithful on what the Church teaches regarding ethical forms of care or end of life questions; on how to advocate for their loved ones in order to protect their God-given dignity at every stage.

- The parish family to be mindful of the families who are supporting disabled or sick family members, by encouraging acts of charity through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; clergy, pastoral leaders, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to sensitively care for and provide spiritual nourishment to these individuals and to their families.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Family members with support and guidance, helping them to recognize the grace-filled work of mercy and ministry that they perform by caring for the sick and needy.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to welcome caregivers and listen to their needs and those of the family members they serve.
- Pastoral leaders and volunteers who assist caregivers in carrying out their work of mercy.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Remembrance in prayer for all those who are caring for the sick, aging, and disabled in the parish community.
- Small groups for caregivers to share their experiences and challenges, pray together, and provide mutual support.
- Workshops to address caregiving from a faith perspective and its impact on marriage and family dynamics.
- Information sessions and resources on church teaching concerning ethical forms of care, establishing advance directives, and end of life questions.

Accompanying Families and Family Members in Complex or Difficult Situations

Accompanying Families Experiencing Addictions

Addictions (e.g., alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, pornography, etc.) may be a cause or consequence of trauma such as abuse and violence, child neglect, crime, debt, unemployment, homelessness, and family breakdown. When a person is coping with his or her addiction or the consequences of a family member's addiction, the Church can offer hope, help, and healing. The root cause of the addiction needs to be addressed with effective treatment and compassionate care.

To accompany individuals and families dealing with addictions, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Families and the faithful on how to help when someone they know is dealing with an addiction.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, parish staff, particularly Catholic school educators and catechists, to recognize and respond to situations that may warrant intervention or immediate assistance.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Persons with addictions to seek peace and healing from a counselor and, for Catholics, the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Persons with addictions and families affected by addictions to obtain assistance and use the resources available for their spiritual and material needs.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities for prayer, retreats, or other forms of spiritual renewal for those suffering from addictions and their family members.
- Instruction for clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to recognize the needs of families affected by addictions, and assist the family members, especially children, of those with addictions.
- Awareness raising and educational programs at the parish or diocesan/eparchial levels about addictions and how to cope with them.
- Comprehensive list of referrals for counselors, treatment facilities, and support groups.

Accompanying Families Experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse

There are families that suffer from situations of domestic violence in the form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse as well as the abuse and neglect of children. The Church should offer assistance and healing to those who cause and suffer from these forms of abuse.

To accompany the victims/survivors and minister to those who abuse others, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- The faithful on church teaching about the inherent dignity of each person made in the image of God, love of neighbor, and the incompatibility of domestic abuse with our faith.[94] Church

teaching and canon law[95] acknowledge that grave mental or physical danger to a spouse or child constitutes legitimate causes for severing conjugal living.

- Clergy, pastoral leaders, parish staff, catechists, and Catholic school educators about the signs of domestic violence, abuse, and neglect of children and provide guidance on how to help or report to civil authorities, as necessary.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Those who use violence to seek healing through counseling, and for the Catholic spouse, to have recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Families and victims/survivors to seek out help, resources, and support from trained marriage counselors or therapists, clergy, and parish staff.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Spiritual and material support for victims/survivors, such as retreats, opportunities for prayer, spiritual direction, etc.
- Workshops that discuss church teaching and include information about the signs of domestic violence and guidance on how to help, as determined by mandatory reporting laws.
- Easily accessible list of contacts for counselors, shelters, and local agencies.

Accompanying Families with Members Who Have Disabilities, Chronic Illness, or Mental Illness

Disability, chronic illness, and/or mental illness (which may include mental incapacities, mental health concerns, and psychological imbalances) are realities that may be present in families at any stage of life. Families in these circumstances bear witness to the beauty of all lives by faithfully serving these members of their family.[96] They should be encouraged and supported by the family of the faithful, especially when they are caring for children with special needs.

To accompany families who experience disability, chronic illness or mental illness, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Parishioners with a disability, chronic illness, or mental illness by providing catechetical resources and classes that meet their specific needs.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, parish staff, catechists, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion on how to respond to the individual needs of those in the parish with disabilities or illnesses.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Persons with disabilities, chronic illness, or mental illness by ensuring a welcoming spirit within the parish and by facilitating meaningful parish involvement for these individuals and their families.
- Primary caretakers and parents to find the help and resources they need within the Church and community.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Catechetical resources and classes that are tailored to the disabled or, when appropriate, the chronically ill or mentally ill; opportunities for prayer, spiritual guidance, and formation, as appropriate.
- Accessibility and accommodations at churches and parish or diocesan/eparchial events (e.g., physical access, large-print resources, and sign-language interpretation, if possible).
- Resources to help parishes be sensitive to the needs of members with disabilities and illnesses in their community.
- Comprehensive list of community-based educational, transitional, medical, and respite support and services.

Accompanying Families with Members Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction or Sexual Identity Incongruence

Families with members who experience same-sex attraction or sexual identity incongruence (i.e., gender dysphoria or similar experiences) may have many needs and questions particular to their situation.

To ensure that families in this situation receive guidance and care, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Men or women attracted to persons of the same-sex or experiencing sexual identity incongruence about God's plan for sexuality and the call to chaste love.[97]
- Parents, families, and the parish community on the Church's teaching concerning the human person and the Christian redemptive and restorative vision of human sexuality[98] as well as how to responsibly hand on these truths to one's children.[99]
- Family members with guiding values and principles to assist them with difficult decisions that they may need to make regarding their family member's relationship/s such as same-sex sexual behavior, invitations to same-sex ceremonies or similar, etc. In respect to the latter, two general principles are: consideration for the nature of marriage—the union of a husband

and a wife, a man and a woman—and what attendance at events of this kind would signify. Attendance at same-sex ceremonies, or similar, may demonstrate support for that which is incompatible with the truth about marriage.

- Families and the parish community on the dangers of so-called "gender-affirming" hormonal and surgical interventions, providing information from sound science on these topics; on the moral principles regarding interventions or an alteration of the reproductive system.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Men and women experiencing same-sex attraction to recognize that they are children of God, made in his image, and called to holiness.
- Individuals with same-sex attraction and their families of origin with spiritual, sacramental, and emotional support.
- Families to express their love and affection for family members who experience same-sex attraction in ways that maintain a constructive relationship with them.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff to recognize the dignity of all God's children and treat with respect those individuals in the parish community who experience same-sex attraction or sexual identity incongruence.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Workshops, seminars, and/or classes to instruct the parish community on what the Church teaches about the dignity of persons and human sexuality.
- Ongoing instruction and guidance for clergy, ministry leaders, and parish staff on how to offer pastoral support to men and women experiencing same-sex attraction or sexual identity incongruence and their families; formation for spiritual directors, confessors, and mentors who can listen and accompany with compassion and charity by encouraging lifestyles that reflect God's design for human sexuality.
- Small group workshops or seminars for families to provide practical advice on how to make decisions that may be faced regarding a family member's relationship/s such as how to discuss the distinctions between the person, inclination, and action; establish healthy boundaries; show and communicate love without affirming behaviors or choices that are contrary to Catholic teaching (e.g., same-sex "marriage"), etc.
- Resources and support groups "noted for their adherence to Church teaching" that explain the Church's pastoral teaching with truth and charity.[100]
- Comprehensive list of referrals for counselors with a Catholic perspective who can assist the person experiencing same-sex attraction or sexual identity incongruence and their families.

Accompanying Families with Incarcerated Members

Families with incarcerated members, especially children of prison inmates, can benefit from specific pastoral care and active participation in the life of the Church. Assistance and outreach to ex-offenders (i.e., those who have finished their sentence and have been released from jail) should also be encouraged.

To accompany families who are affected by incarceration, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff on effective and prudent ways to welcome people returning to the parish community after serving a sentence.
- Pastoral leaders, parish staff, and the parish community on how to welcome and respond with sensitivity to the needs of families with incarcerated members, especially children.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Ex-offenders and their families by offering various forms of support and opportunities for involvement, when possible, in the parish and civic community.
- Parish families with incarcerated members by inviting them to participate fully in the life of the parish.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A network of spiritual and moral support for families with incarcerated members by engaging parish volunteers who can build a relationship with the affected family and extend friendship and support on behalf of the parish.
- Opportunities for catechesis and sacramental preparation tailored to the specific needs or situations of ex-offenders.
- Services to families and ex-offenders such as transportation, meals, employment assistance, counseling programs, language classes, and mentoring opportunities (parish mentoring programs should preferably begin outreach to offenders prior to their release and assist them during transition back to the community); support to the children of affected families by facilitating communication and visitation with their incarcerated family members.
- A comprehensive list of local and community resources for individuals and families affected by incarceration.

Accompanying Single Parent Families

There are many single parents today on account of divorce, the death of a spouse, imprisonment, absence of a marriage contract, etc. They may feel forgotten, unwelcome, or judged. It is important to reach out with attentive care in response to their individual needs, especially at the parish level.

To accompany single parents, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Single parents on the resources and assistance that the parish community can provide.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff on how to handle with sensitivity the various situations that may be present in single parent homes.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Single parents in their responsibility toward their children and in their efforts to provide for their family by helping them be strengthened in faith, hope, and trust in the providence of God.
- The parish community to offer hospitality, assistance, and resources of all kinds to single parents. Resources may include methods of self-improvement, growth mindset, and problem solving from various disciplines integrated within a Christian worldview.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Programs designed to alleviate the single parent's unique burdens and needs, especially mindful of unwed women who are raising a family or expecting a child.
- Childcare and financial assistance, as needed, to allow single parents to attend parish or diocesan/eparchial events.
- Half-day or evening retreats tailored to the single parent's needs with childcare provided.

Accompanying Mixed and Interreligious Marriages and Families

Mixed marriages and interreligious marriages may pose certain challenges and possibilities to couples and their families. These challenges, as well as the responsibilities and duties of the spouses, should be understood by the couple and support provided to the Catholic spouse and children by the clergy and parish community.[101]

To accompany couples in mixed and interreligious marriages and families, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Engaged couples with a non-Catholic member on the challenges of a mixed or interreligious marriage and of the obligation for the Catholic spouse, assumed at marriage, to baptize and educate their children in the Catholic faith to the extent possible.[102]
- The non-Catholic spouse in mixed or interreligious marriages about the Catholic faith, avoiding, however, any form of proselytism.[103]

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Engaged couples to recognize the positive elements present in mixed marriages that can be developed and contribute to the ecumenical movement.[104]
- Catholic spouses to pray for their spouse and bear authentic witness to the Catholic faith while fulfilling their obligations; spouses in mixed marriages to pray together at ecumenical prayer services or to attend Mass together even though the reception of Holy Communion is not ordinarily possible for the non-Catholic spouse, except as provided by canonical norms.[105]
- Spouses to meet other spouses in similar situations for support at the parish or in the diocese/eparchy.[106]

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Educational and social events sponsored at parish or diocesan/eparchial levels for non-Catholic spouses to learn about the faith, when appropriate, in collaboration with the diocesan/eparchial ecumenical and interfaith activities leader.
- Ecumenical prayer services and retreats for both Catholic and non-Catholic Christian spouses.
- Opportunities to meet and support other spouses in similar circumstances in the parish or diocesan/eparchial community.

Accompanying Intercultural Families

Marriage between people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds is common and leads to a variety of intercultural families present in local churches. Particular attention should be given to the pastoral needs of these families with members from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds such as African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, European American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, etc.

To accompany intercultural families, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff by providing intercultural competency training.[107]
- The parish community about the different cultures represented by the families in their midst.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Families of particular cultural and ethnic groups within the parish to share their gifts and cultural heritage with the parish community, such as parish-wide events.
- The parish community to find ways of incorporating different cultural customs and traditions into the life of the parish.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Events that highlight the many cultures represented in the parish community.
- Small circles of families with similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds to encourage friendship and support.
- Incorporation of permissible cultural customs and traditions at liturgical celebrations and parish events.

Accompanying Migrant, Refugee, and Immigrant Families

Migrant, refugee, and immigrant families experience a variety of challenges while leading itinerant lives or relocating their homes and livelihoods. Migrant ministry extends itself to all those who, besides refugees and immigrants, are people on the move (itinerant), such as seasonal workers, seafarers, nomads, transportation workers, circus and traveling show folks, etc.[108] The Church welcomes all itinerant peoples to the parish community.

To accompany migrant, refugee, and immigrant families, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Migrant, refugee, and immigrant families of the resources and provisions offered them by the parish or diocesan/eparchial community that may include catechesis, formation, and preparation for the reception of the sacraments.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff on appropriate and effective ways to welcome refugee and immigrant families, as well as families whose livelihood force them to be regularly on the move (i.e., migrant or itinerant families).

- The parish community on how to welcome the stranger in their midst by learning about the realities faced by migrants, refugees, and immigrants and calling to mind the challenges endured by the Holy Family of Nazareth during their time of exile.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Migrants and people on the move, who cannot attend a parish regularly or participate in parish life, to seek out spiritual direction and opportunities to avail themselves of the sacraments whenever possible.
- Refugee and immigrant families to attend parish functions and connect with the parish community and to receive spiritual, moral, and material support.
- Mentors for immigrants and their families, ideally from their country of origin or ethnic background and who speak their language.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Welcome sessions for immigrant and refugee families to integrate them into the life of the parish and tend to their sacramental needs.
- Catechesis for migrant, refugee, and immigrant couples and their families, especially preparation for the reception of the sacraments and assistance to address particular needs that may hinder their full reception (e.g., assistance to resolve invalid marriages, etc.).
- Material, spiritual, and moral support and resources for migrant, refugee, and immigrant families such as language tutoring, legal assistance, housing, work opportunities, and schooling for their children.

Accompanying Military Families

The commitment that military families make in service to our country is deserving of our respect and appreciation. Whether they serve close to home or far away, military life can be strenuous and demanding. Military families often look to the Church as a place of belonging, stability, and support.

To accompany military families, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and parish staff on appropriate and effective ways to support military couples and families dealing with the challenges of transitions, trainings, deployments, and relocation.

- Pastoral leaders and the parish community to recognize the gifts that military families bring to their parish, even if only for a temporary amount of time. Training received in one parish can be used later in another parish community should the family need to relocate.
- The parish community on how to actively welcome military families and invite them to engage in the life of the parish. Parishioners who are veterans can take an active part in this ministry of hospitality.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Military families to express how the parish can best support them as a faith community, particularly if their loved ones are far from home.
- The parish community to pray with military families who may be dealing with loneliness, anxiety, or uncertainty while family members are deployed or serving in dangerous areas.
- Individuals in the parish community who may be serving in the Reserves or the National Guard. These citizen soldiers and their families may be living far from their unit and therefore have restricted access to support.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities for catechesis and ongoing faith formation to returning veterans and their families, especially sacramental preparation for children.
- Material, spiritual, and moral support and resources for military families who have a family member who is deployed as well as for veterans returning to civilian life, their spouses, and their families during the delicate time of transition.
- Prayer services or other liturgical moments for veterans who may be dealing with the challenges of visible injuries or invisible injuries, such as post-traumatic stress or moral injury.
- Spiritual and moral support for veterans at local Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and Respite Homes.
- Comprehensive list of community-based professionals and services for veterans and information about the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, that provides a full range of pastoral ministry and spiritual services to those in the United States Armed Forces.

Pillar IV. Advocacy

To advance the truths of the human person, marriage, and the family, through advocacy in the public square.

Advocacy for just policies that support marriage and family life is an area that needs faithful, competent, and creative attention. The erosion and redefinition of marriage in many nations, especially in the United States, has further contributed to governmental policies and laws that seek to redefine parenthood, human sexuality, and sexual difference (male and female). In addition, the rights of children to a mother and a father and the rights of parents to raise and educate their children have been violated as false agendas are promoted.

Priorities for advocacy include the protection of human life; the rights of children and parents; a sound education in human sexuality consistent with natural law and church teaching; the freedom of persons and institutions to serve in accord with their religious or moral convictions; support for the elderly, infirm, disabled, or otherwise vulnerable members of society; protection for victims of abuse, exploitation, or violence; compassionate care for those experiencing gender dysphoria or sexual identity incongruence; economic policies that favor the stability and unity of family life such as affordable housing for families, affordable healthcare, and family leave and flexible employment options; school choice; and immigration policy that values and upholds families.

Vital areas that may prove to be opportunities for advancing new alliances and momentum include laws opposing pornography; policies and laws that incentivize and favor marriage between a man and a woman; the prevention of the normalization of polyamory; laws concerning no-fault divorce; and protections for adoption and foster care services. Laws that entrench or further advance the redefinitions of marriage, parenthood, or sexuality must be countered with clarity and truth. These include laws that disregard the rights of children to a mother and a father and the rights of parents to raise and educate their children; that financially penalize marriage; or that encourage societal devaluing of the family.

To advance faithful and sound advocacy for marriage and family life, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- The parish community about how the Church's teaching on marriage and family and the inherent dignity of man and woman—based in natural law—can and ought to inform government policies and laws.
- Families and all the faithful on the Theology of the Body, chastity, and respect for the gift of human sexuality in contrast to false gender theories and ideologies. This education ought to include strategies on how to oppose these false theories in public life, especially in schools, as well as in the media and entertainment industry.

- Families, the parish community, and all the faithful in the principles of Catholic social teaching on issues that impact the well-being of families, such as poverty, family wages, paid family leave, healthcare, housing, and restorative justice.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- Lawmakers to act courageously in the name of truth to promote and defend God's plan for marriage and family in the public sphere.
- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and the parish community to witness and advocate together for policies that strengthen marriage and families.
- All the faithful to lead the organization of grassroots support for prioritizing authentic marriage and family life for the common good and opposition to the injustice of laws that have redefined marriage and family life, as well as laws that violate the dignity of the human person made in the image and likeness of God, all of which often result in policies and situations that restrict the Church's and individuals' exercise of religious freedom.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Opportunities for education on specific issues coming before local, state, or national governments that impact the Church and individuals with respect to human identity, sexuality, and family life.
- Workshops and trainings for local leaders and the parish community, possibly in collaboration with state Catholic conferences, that instruct how to advocate for issues (e.g., how to write secular articles, engage in the public square, lobby government officials, support legislation, etc.).

Next Steps: Implementation

Christian Families as Joy-Filled Witnesses

The Christian family is called to radiate God's love to the world. When the world sees a joyful family, it sees God working in history. Marriage and family life ministry should encourage and assist couples and families in their midst to become effective agents of evangelization. Families should be reminded that they form an evangelizing community that "gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives" [109] and "embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others."[110] The success of a pastoral plan for marriage and family life depends, ultimately, on whether married couples and families themselves are becoming ever more joy-filled witnesses as domestic churches[111] and missionary disciples of the risen Christ.

The Role of the Parish Community as a Family of Families

The parish in particular, is a family of families, and as such, is called to be the main source of pastoral care for marriages and families.[112] The bond between the parish and the domestic church is a vital reality in need of further pastoral attention and creativity, so that the parish may truly be "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters."[113]

Together, clergy, consecrated, and the laity must advance the Gospel of the family, the Good News that Jesus Christ, through the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery, has redeemed all human families, is close to every one of them, and offers them his mercy and grace through the Church.[114] In this time of great need in our Church and country, it is imperative to strengthen marriage and family life ministries and to continually evaluate what structures and positions can advance this work within our parish and diocesan/eparchial families.[115]

For the parish to become a family of families, marriage and family life directors should facilitate intentional outreach and accompaniment to families in various situations. The parish may not be able to care for all the challenging situations that families experience, but it must be a place of welcome and mercy, a home where help is provided, and healing begins.

To advance an authentic response to various situations, a pastoral plan should aim to

EDUCATE . . .

- Clergy, pastoral leaders, and all parish staff to recognize and respond as appropriate to each particular situation with sensitivity and compassion.
- Mentoring couples and families who can accompany individuals, couples, or families in need and connect them to professional sources when necessary.

ENCOURAGE . . .

- All families, especially those in need or distress, with opportunities of prayer and spiritual support.
- The parish community to offer a responsive outreach by forming networks of support and services to couples and families in need.

ENGAGE

Pastoral strategies to accomplish these goals may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Need-specific opportunities of prayer and spiritual support to all families, especially those in distress.
- Training for pastoral leaders and parish staff in the recommendations suggested in this framework and as adapted to the local pastoral needs of the parish or diocese/eparchy.

- Diocesan/eparchial informational events per issue (e.g., parenting classes, help with addictions, marriage tribunal advocacy, men's and women's ministries, etc.).
- Appropriate resources made available to the parish community (e.g., during the Sacrament of Reconciliation or pastoral counseling, printed in bulletins and other formats, lending library of catechetical books, etc.); a comprehensive list of resources and referrals for various situations and difficulties.

The Role of the Marriage and Family Life Director

It is the responsibility of the marriage and family life director at the parish and diocesan/eparchial levels to serve the individual and collective needs of families under the direction of their local ordinary/hierarch or pastor. This pastoral framework is just the beginning of a process that requires the collaboration of the clergy, parish, and diocesan/eparchial ministry leaders to recognize and respond to the particular needs of the faithful. The framework should serve as a living resource and point of reference for the areas of need that are prioritized at the local levels through a process of pastoral planning.

It is of paramount importance that marriage and family life directors and other leaders entrusted with the responsibility of caring for couples and families receive spiritual enrichment, theological training, and ongoing formation in any areas that concern the well-being and promotion of married couples and families. Marriage and family life directors will also benefit from one another by sharing and exchanging information, best practices, and useful resources that are developed and utilized in their ministries.

- For a listing of resources and materials to supplement this pastoral framework, visit *https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries*.

Conclusion

"All of us are called to keep striving toward something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together."[116] Through our ministries and efforts to serve married couples and families, may the Church in the United States be an ever-stronger witness of unity to advance the beauty and joy of God's plan. May we walk together as disciples of his Word, as a family of families, bringing the light of Christ to every situation and challenge.

We entrust all ministry and advocacy for families in the United States to the protection of the Holy Family. Through the intercession of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, let us pray for all married couples and families, that they may know the peace that comes from placing God at the center of their intimate community of love and life.

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families, too,
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection, and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,
Graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.[117]

Notes

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1 Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* [AL] (March 19, 2016), no. 1.

2 See AL, nos. 8, 29, 32, 58-88; Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* [DC] (December 25, 2005), no. 11; Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* [FC] (November 22, 1981), nos. 11-16; Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families* [LF] (February 2, 1994), nos. 6-12.

[3] FC, no. 17.

[4] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], Pastoral Letter *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* [LL] 2009.

[5] AL, no. 200.

[6] AL, no. 201, quoting *Relatio Synodi* 2014, no. 32.

[7] AL, no. 201, quoting *Relatio Synodi* 2014, no. 33.

[8] AL, no. 1.

[9] AL, no. 201.

[10] Pope John Paul II, Homily in Perth, Australia (November 30, 1986), no. 4.

[11] AL, no. 31.

[12] See AL, nos. 32-57; Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG] (November 24, 2013), nos. 66-67; LL, pp. 17-27.

[13] These include a strong desire for lasting marriages; a solid correlation between education and marriage stability; a robust connection between religious attendance and intact families; social science evidence that children thrive in homes with married mothers and fathers; the gift of indissolubility being embraced and lived by married couples; a growing awareness of the need for mercy and healing; strong families staying committed even through difficult times; increased awareness of the destructiveness of pornography and the need to end sexual exploitation; young people who are living the faith and serving others with joy; renewed approaches to marriage preparation and formation inspired by the mission of evangelization; immigrant families with strong commitment to family life; and a commitment to countering racism and other prejudices by teaching children well. See AL, nos. 1, 7, 62, and 86-88.

[14] AL, no. 7.

[15] AL, no. 200.

[16] AL, no. 57. See also AL, nos. 36, 201, 230, 291.

[17] AL, no. 200, quoting *Relatio Synodi* 2014, no. 30.

[18] AL, no. 200, quoting *Relatio Synodi* 2015, no. 89.

[19] AL, no. 86.

[20] See AL, nos. 2, 30, and 201.

[21] See the *Codex Iuris Canonici* [CIC] (January 25, 1983), c. 1055, § 2; the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* [CCEO] (October 18, 1990), c. 776 §2.

[22] See EG, no. 220.

[23] These pillars are not mutually exclusive and overlap in various ways. They are intended to assist the prioritization and organization of plans, strategies, and activities at the service of marriage and family life. It is also important to acknowledge that this vision cannot be limited to the work of

marriage and family life ministers alone—though their role and leadership are vital—but involves a collaboration of leaders across ministries.

[24] AL, no. 71.

[25] AL, nos. 11, 63, 71; LL, p. 35.

[26] FC, no. 17.

[27] EG, no. 120; see FC, no. 52.

[28] AL, no. 200.

[29] See AL, nos. 184, 200, 290; FC, nos. 52, 54.

[30] AL, no. 87.

[31] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 1992, no. 2207.

[32] See AL, no. 318.

[33] FC, no. 50.

[34] See AL, nos. 183-184.

[35] EG, no. 165.

[36] Proper formation for ministerial leadership would assume that leaders themselves receive an integral formation based on the four categories of formation with sufficient inclusion of intercultural competency training. The term "missionary" has been chosen to emphasize Pope Francis's call to missionary discipleship in *Amoris Laetitia* and *Evangelii Gaudium*. See USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (2005); USCCB, *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization* (2017).

[37] USCCB, *Program for Priestly Formation* [PPF] 2006, no. 80.

[38] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* [GS] (December 7, 1965), no. 22.

[39] See AL, nos. 55, 177, 286.

[40] See EG, nos. 165-168; AL, nos. 58, 207.

[41] See AL, nos. 73, 80; LL, pp. 7-16.

[42] See AL, nos. 71-75; LL, pp. 29-55.

[43] See AL, nos. 289-290.

[44] The principles of Catholic social teaching include life and dignity of the human person; call to family/community/participation; human rights and responsibilities; preferential option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity of work and rights of workers; solidarity and subsidiarity; and care for God's creation. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [CSDC] 2004.

[45] FC, no. 75.

[46] AL, no. 230; EG, no. 170.

[47] EG, no. 169.

[48] See AL, no. 200.

[49] AL, no. 5.

[50] Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* [CV] (March 25, 2019), no. 262, quoting *Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 2018.

[51] Such interventions attempt to change the function and outward appearance of an individual's body.

[52] See CIC, c. 1063,1°; CCEO, c. 783 §1, 1°.

[53] NB: Common practice in the United States is to place this phase during adolescence (due to the nature of the goals); however, the Pontifical Council for the Family's *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* places this phase during engagement, separating it out as a time of formation prior to immediate preparation (no. 32).

[54] CV, no. 259.

[55] AL, no 35.

[56] See AL, nos. 148, 151, 281-286; FC, no. 40; LF, nos. 14, 16; CV, nos. 242-243.

[57] CV, no. 265.

[58] See CCC, nos. 2337-2356.

[59] CV, no. 242.

[60] Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (May 13, 1996), no. 50.

[61] AL, no. 207.

[62] FC, no. 51.

[63] AL, no. 211.

[64] Pope Benedict XVI to the US Bishops (March 9, 2012).

[65] It is critical to ensure that all members of the marriage preparation team are living in accordance with church teaching and giving credible witness to their faith. See CIC, c. 1067 and *http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we- believe/canon-law/complementary-norms/canon-1067-the-investigation-of-freedom-to-marry.cfm*.

[66] See AL, no. 211; EG, no. 169.

[67] CSDC, no. 220.

[68] "Chastity is not a mortification of love but rather a condition for real love." *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, no. 24. Also see *https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/marriage-preparation-and-cohabiting-couples*.

[69] See AL, no. 80; FC, no. 32; LF, no. 12.

[70] See CIC, c. 1065 §2.

[71] See AL, no. 218.

[72] CIC, c. 1063, 4°; CCEO, c. 783 §3.

[73] See AL, no. 126.

[74] See CCC, no. 2365.

[75] See CCC, nos. 2337-2356; 2364-2365.

[76] See USCCB, *Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography*, 2015.

[77] CV, no. 263.

[78] CV, no. 263.

[79] AL, no. 29.

[80] See AL, nos. 55, 172.

[81] See AL, nos. 171-177.

[82] See *https://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/prayers/upload/Rite-for-the-Blessing-of-a-Child-in-the-Womb.pdf*.

[83] See NCCB (USCCB), *A Family Perspective in Church and Society: A Manual for All Pastoral Leaders*, 1988, 1998; NCCB, *Families at the Center: A Handbook for Parish Ministry with a Family Perspective*, 1990.

[84] AL, no. 232.

[85] See AL, chapter 8.

[86] See AL, nos. 304, 307. See also FC, no. 84.

[87] AL, no. 287.

[88] See CIC, cc. 226 §2, 774 §2, 835 §4; CCEO, c. 627 - §1.

[89] AL, no. 184.

[90] AL, no. 317.

[91] CV, no. 267.

[92] AL, no. 191.

[93] CV, no. 262.

[94] See USCCB, *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*, 1992, 2002.

[95] See CIC, c. 1153.

[96] "If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognize and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities." AL, no. 47, quoting *Relatio Finalis* 2015, no. 21.

[97] See USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination*, 2006.

[98] See CCC, no. 2333.

[99] See Congregation for Catholic Education, *"Male and Female He Created Them": Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, 2019.

[100] *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination*, p. 22.

[101] See AL, nos. 247-48, CIC, cc. 1128-1129 and CCEO, c. 816.

[102] See CCC, 1635; CIC, cc. 1086, §2, 1125; CCEO, cc. 803 §3, 814. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, nos. 150-151.

[103] See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, 2007, footnote 49; The Joint Working Group Between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness*, 1995, no. 19.

[104] See AL, no. 247.

[105] See AL, no. 247; CIC, c. 844; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 149; USCCB, *Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion*, 1996.

[106] *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, nos.145-148.

[107] "Knowledge, attitudes, and skills in intercultural and interracial relations are indispensable requirements for engaging in the Church's evangelizing mission to preach, teach, and witness to the Gospel." *Living as Missionary Disciples*, p. 25.

[108] Pontifical Commission on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Circular Letter to Episcopal Conferences on the Church and Human Mobility*, 1978.

[109] EG, no. 24.

[110] EG, no. 24.

[111] See AL, no. 200.

[112] AL, nos. 202, 229.

[113] EG, no. 28, quoting John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* [CL] (September 30, 1988), no. 26.

[114] See AL, no. 62, quoting *Relatio Synodi* 2014, no. 14.

[115] See AL, nos. 200-204; LL, pp. 57-58.

[116] AL, no. 325.

[117] AL, no. 325.